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LIVE LATIN¹

[It is to be regretted that the publication of this paper comes so long after Dr. Rouse's visit to America. For this delay the author is not responsible.—Ed.]

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What I have to say about teaching Latin will be based on the assumption that our prime object is to impart to our pupils the ability to read the great Latin classics. Other things may, and indeed must inevitably, come along with this ability to read, but these are by-products. A smattering of Latin is a handy thing for a druggist or a lawyer to have about him; the drill in Latin grammar will help a boy in his other studies; even translation, from Latin into English, may be regarded as of "practical" value, in that it sharpens the learner's appreciation of the structure and vocabulary of the mother-tongue. But I confess frankly that I do not pretend to care for Latin or to teach it, as the basis of French, or English, or syntax, or botanical nomenclature, or mental gymnastics, but solely as the vehicle of one of the world's greatest literatures, the language of Cicero, and Vergil, and Livy, and Tacitus. I hold, therefore, that our supreme duty as Latin teachers is to train our pupils to read (and that means to enjoy and be educated by) the literature of ancient Rome. To this creed I may add, as a sort of corollary, that for those high-school boys and girls who are not going on to the university it is, if possible, even more vitally important than for those who do go on that the Latin course should waste no time on nonessentials, but should be so contrived as to sacrifice everything else, if necessary, to promote the learner's first-hand knowledge of the best in Latin prose and verse. I wish to make my position in this matter clear at the outset, for I should be sorry to have anyone think, when I go on to speak about talking Latin and writing and memorizing and listening to it, that

¹ A paper read before the Classical Association of Northern California, July 1, 1911.

I have any other regard for these processes than as helping directly to acquire the power to read.

Now before attempting to sketch a method of teaching which shall attain the goal I have just defined, let us reconnoiter a bit, and endeavor to make out the chief obstacles we shall have to overcome. One great difficulty to the modern child is the elaborate *inflectional system* of Latin; another is *vocabulary*; and a third—and this I am convinced is far and away the worst of them all—is *word-order*. Inflections can be mastered by dogged grinding; vocabulary will come, in time, even to those indolent ones who will rather look up a word ten times in the lexicon than learn it at once by dint of a little honest exertion; but *word-order*—the Latin order of presenting ideas to the mind, the Latin way of emphasizing, co-ordinating, subordinating speech-symbols—is a mystery to which, I sorrowfully believe, very few college students succeed in penetrating. Happily the reason for our weakness in the face of this difficulty is as plain as day. High school and college alike train students to *translate* Latin into English. They do not—to our shame be it confessed—train to *read* Latin. Now there may be a vast deal of mental discipline in keeping your eye busily skimming from line to line, picking up here a nominative, there a verb, and yonder an adverb or an adjective, the while your memory is feverishly overhauling its stock in search of apt equivalents, and your tongue is nimbly pronouncing an English sentence that will almost, if not quite, parse; but all this isn't reading Latin, nor alas! does it even lead to reading Latin. It doesn't lead to anything much—except a pretty general, and perhaps not inexcusable, conviction that the process of acquiring a dead language is likely to bring a boy where he will have no use for any other kind. It is to this fault then in our teaching that we must at once address ourselves. If we are not prepared to eliminate the translation recitation altogether we must at least take steps to give our pupils something which will train them, as translation never will, to think the thoughts of Cicero, after him, in Latin, not in English—

una salus haec est, hoc est tibi pervincendum,
hoc facias, sive id non pote sive pote.

Fortunately there is no reason to despair. Word-order is hard, mainly because we ignore it; if we approach the problem

intelligently we shall find it may be solved. The method I wish to recommend is not a new one. Erasmus was a great exponent of it in his day, and it has in our own times been borrowed by Dr. Walther and the other reformers of modern-language teaching. In fact it is this method as much as anything else which has given the study of modern languages its tremendous vogue among us. It is high time we ancients were borrowing it back again, and restoring Latin teaching to the efficiency which characterized it of old. In England Dr. Rouse, headmaster of the Perse School, Cambridge, has been for years employing the *viva voce* method in teaching Greek and Latin. The results he has obtained have made him an ardent apostle of the faith, and his papers in the *Classical Review* and elsewhere will give you a far clearer and more convincing demonstration of the possibilities of this kind of work than I can hope to make. I should be sorry to play the hateful part of an epitomizer and lead anyone to dispense with reading for himself the wise and stimulating words of Dr. Rouse.¹ Yet I cannot discuss the subject at all without referring to the Perse School, and it will perhaps be simplest to describe the method in vogue there, as well as I can, before proceeding to make a few suggestions for the betterment of our own.

The keynote of this new-old method is the stress laid from the very first upon the *spoken* as contrasted with the *written* word. The master uses Latin as far as possible instead of English, and requires the answers to his questions to be made in the same language. As a sample of the way in which the first lesson may be given I quote from an article in the *Rivista di Scienza*:

The master begins by rising in his place and saying *surgo*. He then calls on a boy to write the word on the blackboard—for each new word has to be so written, and it must not be spelled; if written wrong, it must be repeated more distinctly till it can be written right. The master then tells a boy, in English, to rise, and as he rises the master says to the boy *surgis*, which is also written down. Being again seated the master tells the class to say to him, as he rises, what he had said to the boy, and the acts are repeated. Next he tells one or

¹ "Latin Composition," *Class. Rev.*, XXI (1907), 129 ff.; "Translation," *ibid.*, XXII (1908), 105 ff.; "Shall We Drop Latin Prose?" *ibid.*, XXIV (1910), 73 ff.; "Classical Work and Method in the Twentieth Century," *Rivista di Scienza*, IV (1908); *The Teaching of Latin and Greek* (pamphlet—no date, no place).

more boys to rise with him; and as he does so he says *surgimus*; the class is told to rise, and the master says *surgitis*. The same variation is made as before. Finally one by his direction rises, and the master says to the rest *surgit*; two or more rise, and he says to the others *surgunt*. The six forms that stand on the blackboard, completing the present indicative active, are now arranged in the traditional order and the nature of the table is explained. Similar tables are asked for with other verbs, say *lego* and *cado*; and specimens are given with action. A good deal of drill is necessary at this stage. The next exercise may be the imperative combined with this, as follows:

Master: Surge.

Boy (rising): Surgo.

Master: Surgite.

Boys: Surgimus.

And so on. The method is worked out in some detail in *A First Latin Course* by W. H. S. Jones (Macmillan, 1908), a master in the Perse School. It must not be supposed that the conversations can be taken verbatim from any book; they must be spontaneous; but *A First Latin Course* will serve a teacher as a model, and furnish hints for developing lessons of his own, if he wishes to use this direct method.

For early reading, before a classical author is taken up, Dr. Rouse uses material written for the purpose, or adapted from Livy, Petronius, Apuleius—anywhere, I take it, where he can find interesting stories capable of being retold in simpler form for the beginner. And he says:

I have found that the pleasure of the pupils can be enormously increased if these stories are told first, before they are read in print. There is something personal in telling a story; you may use the arts of the speaker, the dramatic pauses, the suggestion of tone, to heighten the effect; and any difficulty can be at once explained, of course in the same language, the points may be brought out, and the new words driven home by question and answer. After the story has been told, each boy will write out his version of it for home work, and—hullo, this is Latin composition! We have been doing Latin prose all this time without knowing it!¹

For this method of teaching prose composition Dr. Rouse claims that the boy does his work with interest, with intelligence, and with few or no mistakes. The mistakes have been eliminated in advance by the careful explanation of the whole story brought out in the class discussion. And if it is true that to write a thing down fixes it in the memory, it is certainly better to fix it right than to fix it

¹ *The Teaching of Latin and Greek*, pp. 10 f.

wrong. Finally, this kind of composition involves much more practice in a given time than the usual mode. First comes the story told by the teacher—drill in following the spoken Latin; then the question and answer by boys and master—drill in oral composition; then the writing-out of the story in the boy's own Latin—drill in written composition.

As an example of the way in which question and answer may be used in furnishing supplementary drill in connection with the reading lesson, I quote again the *Rivista* paper (pp. 17 f.):

Take a simple sentence which may occur in one of the earliest reading exercises: *incolae adventum Romanorum expectabant*; question and answer will follow after this fashion, the book being open:

Magister: Quid expectabant incolae?

Puer s. pueri: Adventum Romanorum expectabant incolae.

M. Quorum adventum expectabant incolae?

P. Romanorum adventum expectabant incolae.

M. Quid faciebant incolae?

P. Expectabant incolae adventum Romanorum.

Observe how each answer requires attention and instant response; and how the response involves alteration of the order of words to suit the emphasis. This principle of order more than anything else distinguishes inflected from uninflected languages; it is therefore unfamiliar, and needs constant practice, and it is essential; yet this essential principle is not, as a rule, learned at all by the average boy, because it is not impressed upon him by constant practice. He has too little practice in it altogether, and none at all when order is the only difficulty to be solved. The same principle is essential to clearness and lies at the root of all style; by such practice then, clearness is attained and the elements of style are taught from the first. Later its application to the phrase or sentence is easily made clear. Observe lastly that all the while the words and forms of the language are being fixed in the memory by constant repetition, but the repetition is also intelligent, not mechanical. Far more will have been learned by the above dialogue than by repeating the original sentence thrice over.

It must not be supposed that this method of teaching is deficient on the side of grammar. It is probably true that there is less learning of rules and definitions in the Perse School than in most places, but there is constant drill in the application of grammatical principles. I quote again:¹

We read in *pro Caecina*: "Deicior, inquis, si quis meorum deicitur omnino." You ask: Quid dicit? "Deici se dicit siquis suorum deiciatur." You ask:

¹ *Teaching of Latin and Greek*, p. 12.

Quid dixit? "Deici se, siquis suorum deiceretur." Or you cannot hear an answer. Quid dicis? you say; and the mumbler is punished by having to put his mumble into the oblique. You say to one: Quid facis? He replies. You ask: Quid ago? He says: Quid faciam rogas; or to another, Quid rogavi? Quid faceret ille rogasti. Oblique speech and dependent question can be brought in as soon as the subjunctive mood is learned; they may be used by the master even before, and they can be practiced every day till they become second nature.

Proceeding to the more advanced classes, it appears that large masses of the best authors are read in the original, and discussed in the original. Even then, I believe, a good deal of the reading is done first in class and afterward studied at home. Translation into English is by no means excluded from the program, but it is used only occasionally and then is very carefully prepared and criticized.

Who can doubt that boys trained in this sensible fashion acquire in the four to six years of their school days a thorough and competent reading knowledge of Latin, and a very fair acquaintance with much of the best in Latin literature?

Yet when Dr. Rouse's method is mentioned by American teachers it is commonly criticized as being impracticable for American schools. It is thought that to teach as Dr. Rouse does, requires extraordinary talent, and that what is found to be a well-tempered rapier in his skilful hands would prove an unwieldy bludgeon to one who lacked his ready command of the spoken tongue.

Est istuc quidem aliquid, Laeli, sed nequaquam in isto sunt omnia. I should not undertake to meet Dr. Rouse's sixth form this afternoon and lead them in a discussion, say of a passage in the *Annals*. But give me a chance to begin by teaching beginners the difference between *surgo* and *surgis*, and I cannot think I should be unable to go on until, by the time these youngsters had risen to the university, I should myself have attained a very respectable fluency in speaking Latin. You and I have this enormous advantage over the boys and girls in school, that our vocabulary is a large one, and our knowledge of the grammar rather more than a nodding acquaintance. All that we need is to cultivate the *habit* of expressing ourselves in Latin. Every hour of classroom practice will add perceptibly to the power of our pupils, but where they advance by

inches (slowly adding word to word and idiom to idiom) we shall go ahead by leaps and bounds. There must have been a time, one would suppose, when even Dr. Rouse was put to his trumps now and then to express his thought instantly in Latin. Let no one despair of learning to talk Latin—especially no one who has learned the far harder art of reading Latin. If any Latin teacher is in need of a first-rate tonic, let him treat himself to a few minutes' simple oral work with his next class of beginners. It will astonish and delight him, if the idea is new to him, to observe how instant a response he meets with. I can affirm from my own experience that for arousing and maintaining the interest and attention of the pupils there is nothing like a little spice of real, live Latin injected into your class work. It may be only a simple question as to the meaning of a word, or the identity of a character. It may be a greeting, a quotation from another classic, illustrating the text—anything, in short, which imports the elements of reality and spontaneity into the dull round of reciting lessons already conned.

It would be too much to expect that any one of us should attempt all at once to substitute this Perse School method for our present one throughout the curriculum of the high school. For that neither teachers nor pupils are prepared. But I do wish to urge, with all possible emphasis, that the use of spoken Latin be, in some small degree at least, revived among us. For the teacher who is willing to try it there is no lack either of demonstrations of method, or of such helps as conversation books and dialogues, to furnish hints for the necessary vocabulary and idioms. For the former one may consult Dr. Rouse's papers above referred to. For the latter there is nothing so good as the *Colloquia* of Erasmus. A handy little book is *Sprechen Sie Lateinisch?* a little conversation manual containing Latin and German phrases in parallel columns, and arranged in convenient categories. This book is largely a compilation from Erasmus. Useful, too, would be the *Guide to Latin Conversation* by a father of the Society of Jesus, translated from the French by Stephen W. Wilby, and published by the John Murphy Company, New York. An admirable exposition of his way of teaching to read a classic language with a minimum of English may be seen in Dr. Rouse's Greek reader, called *A Greek Boy at Home*, the text of which is accompanied by a vocabulary where

Greek is explained by Greek, with very little translation. In Germany Direktor Walther's classes learn English with an English-English dictionary—why shouldn't our pupils have some day lexicons in Greek-Greek and Latin-Latin, like this truly model vocabulary of a *A Greek Boy at Home*?

But I must not soar into the empyrean! What all of our teachers can and I firmly believe ought to do is this:

1. To devote at least half the hour in the first-year class to oral drill with books closed.
2. To have all Latin—both prose and verse—read aloud in class, whether or no it is all to be translated.
3. To ask occasional questions in Latin and require answers in the same language.
4. To tell the children little stories from time to time, and require repetitions of them, both oral, and (later) written.
5. To make the pupils read aloud to their fellows, each in his turn, from some simple book well within their grasp—say for second- and third-year classes such an easy reader as Sonnenschein's *Ora maritima*, or Kirtland's *Fabulae faciles*.
6. To require from time to time memorizing of choice excerpts.

I should confidently predict for classes where these things had been done (1) that *word-order*, that *terra incognita* to the average college student, would be very fairly understood and appreciated; (2) that forms and constructions would be much more quickly recognized than is usually the case now; and (3) that the vocabulary—from the large amount of practice in *using* the words, without dictionaries or other helps—would be well mastered; and (4) that, as a result of these other improvements, but most of all of the ability to follow Latin word-order, *the reading of Latin would be robbed of all its terrors*.

How very rare a thing it is, under present conditions, to find a student who can read you out an average sentence in Cicero, not seen before, so intelligently that you, expert though you be, can follow the sense of it! Most boys and girls when asked to do such a thing read like a child beginning the primer, with indiscriminate emphasis upon the important and the unimportant, with false groupings of words, or even with no groupings at all, feeling apparently that each polysyllable successfully weathered is entitled to

the monument of a full stop, and the tribute of a reverent pause. Ask such a one to translate, and observe his eye as it gallops back and forth along the battle-line seeking a weak spot for the first charge, see him pick and choose and haul and push till the whole unwieldy regiment of words is at last, somehow, in motion. "Will it make a sort of sense?" This is the question he is anxiously asking himself as he gives the field a final hurried scrutiny to make sure no straggling *ut*-clause has been left behind.

Contrast this harrowing scene with the process of one who has been taught *Latin*, not *translation*. He will read you his unseen sentence with all the assurance of one who knows that he is dealing with the product of an intelligent mind. He will take it for granted that each group of words in his sentence has a meaning, and he will try to make himself (and you) see this meaning, as he pronounces it. When he has done, you will not need to ask for a translation, for he will have shown by his reading whether or no he caught the full meaning, and if not, a skilful question or two will elicit it.

One who has tried using a little spoken Latin in connection with the usual textbook method will be inclined, I feel quite sure, to keep on with it and increase its use. The great difficulty is lack of confidence on the teacher's part. But a little experimenting will soon show how easily an entirely adequate stock of colloquial Latin may be picked up, and we shall be amazed, ten years hence, to think of our timidity.

The time is ripe for this new movement. The colleges of the country have shown by their general indorsement of the recommendation of the Committee on Entrance Requirements in Latin, that they are no longer disposed to dictate to the schools, but are prepared to meet the latter more than halfway in the attempt to promote intelligent mastery of the subject. The choice of books being left more to the individual schools, it is now possible for the teachers to make a large use of *made* or *adapted* Latin in the early stages of instruction, and to seek a stimulating variety in the later ones. Efficiency, as tested by ability to use the language, is the one thing which will be demanded from now on. The colleges have done what they could; it is now for the secondary schools to reform their teaching, forget the absurdities of the translation method, and teach their boys and girls to read.